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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 000228

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN (HUSHEK), DS/IP/SCA, DS/T/ATA, DS/TIA/ITA,
INL/AEE (BUHLER)
JUSTICE FOR (DUCOT AND NEWCOMBE)

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SUBJECT: NEW INTERIOR MINISTER AND THE AMBASSADOR ARE ON THE SAME
PAGE - BUT HOW DOES THE CHAPTER END?

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11. (SBU) Summary: The Ambassador's introductory meeting with new Minister of Internal Affairs Abdurahim Kaharov revealed Tajikistan's new chief policeman wrestling with, but undaunted by, enormous challenges. Kaharov was trying to retain SWAT forces who were leaving for better paying jobs, train quality and not quantity police officers, take down drug rings rather than just arrest low-level couriers, and solve personnel issues (so difficult he claimed that they made him wish he was investigating a simple murder case). The Ambassador stressed that the Ministry must improve arrests and prosecutions of human traffickers or face potential assistance restrictions; suggested closer partnership with DEA to improve the police counter-narcotics efforts; described plans for cooperation with the Ministry in training and community policing; and requested the Minister's assistance in resolving a nettlesome vehicle registration issue. End summary.

12. (SBU) Giving Minister of Interior Kaharov a month to get settled, the Ambassador, accompanied by Regional Security Officer and International Narcotics and Law Enforcement officers, met with Tajikistan's new chief policeman on February 14. He comes to the job with strong accolades in the local press and a good street reputation as a competent, professional policeman (reftel). He noted he was "in the regions" for the last two years, referring to his work as Chief of the Ministry's northern Soghd region based out of Khujand. Previously he had served as First Deputy Minister in Dushanbe, but like many senior officers, was removed from Headquarters when former Minister Solihev "cleaned house". He said he was from Dushanbe but his parents had come from Sughd. He complimented the Ambassador on her Tajik language skills, noting his own skills were poor, since all of his education in Tajikistan and in Moscow was in Russian.

13. (SBU) Kaharov took a couple pages out of our playbook. He led off by saying his focus would be on counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics. Touching on the first, he acknowledged that he was having trouble retaining personnel in the elite Militia Detachment for Special Purposes (OMON) forces--similar to our SWAT teams--because of low pay. The Ambassador highlighted the opportunities for police special teams to work with Diplomatic Security and Special Operations Command (SOCCENT) and urged continued close embassy contact in this critical area. He agreed with the Ambassador about the importance of the OMON

teams for embassy protection and countering terrorism but said that he had lost 78 officers-- 50% of the staff-- in the last year so retention was definitely a challenge. He added that he intended to address the issue both with additional pay and stronger leadership.

14. (SBU) Kaharov appeared sobered by the Ambassador's clear message that Tajikistan must improve its record in trafficking arrests, prosecutions, and convictions or face potential sanctions on overall assistance in the future in accordance with TIP laws in the United States. He also hoped for improved performance drawing on expertise of the former head of Tajikistan's inter-ministerial commission on trafficking and now First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, Ramazon Rahimov.

15. (SBU) On counter-narcotics, Kaharov acknowledged the biggest criticism of the police was valid; the Interior Ministry officers only arrest low-level couriers but must take aim at big smuggling rings if the effort was to have any impact on the problem. The Ambassador pointed to the readiness of the Drug Enforcement Administration agents at post to collaborate on counter-drug cases.

16. (SBU) Regarding INL issues, the Ambassador listed the construction work at the Ministry of Interior Academy and the embedded Training Manager as prime examples of U.S. willingness to invest in institutional change to improve policing. Kaharov, showing his understanding of his challenges and his previous work as Academy head, forthrightly stated that the Ministry needed to train better quality officers, not just push quantity. He spoke appreciatively of the INL-funded renovation projects on-going at the Academy. He noted that improving training for firefighters and emergency response officers were two of his two key priorities. (Note: INL's training manager is actively developing a curriculum for the firefighters and the embassy's 1207 project will train emergency response teams. End note.)

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17. (SBU) Vehicle registration is a nettlesome issue in Tajikistan and was complicated by a recent presidential decree banning vehicles with tinted windows. When the decree was issued five personal vehicles of embassy staff were in-country or enroute but the decree contained no grandfather provision. Kaharov told the Ambassador that when the issue was discussed in the Tajik inter-agency process he recommended registering the cars as an exception, especially given they were diplomatic vehicles. He suggested the embassy send another Diplomatic Note to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and provide him a copy and he would try to weigh in on the issue again.

18. (SBU) Comment: At this meeting Kaharov lived up to his reputation. He spoke crisply and clearly without notes or hesitation. He demonstrated a quick sense of humor, as when he said he preferred investigating a murder case to dealing with pesky personnel issues, and that the budgetary process was a black hole. He has a tough job trying to raise the standard of the police and his success is uncertain. We expect continued close cooperation and see opportunities to strengthen our engagement.

JACOBSON